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Why Absolute Truth is so Absolutely Important, II; Matt 23:25-39

GPBC

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Introduction – There are 7 “woes” in ch23. Three weeks ago we looked at the first 4 woes in vv13-24. Today we’ll finish the last 3. 7 woes. Jesus pronounces judgment upon the Pharisees and scribes because that’s precisely where false religion leads – to judgment. False religion does not have to be a major world religion like Hinduism or Buddhism to be a false religion. Any departure from the gospel of Jesus Christ is a false path leading to the dead end of eternal ruin. Any deviation from the eternal, absolute truth of God’s Word is a false path leading to emptiness and death rather than fullness and life. The world is filled with all kinds of solutions for life and all kinds of philosophies for how to live life and what to believe about yourself and God and the afterlife. The world is full of many paths and it preaches many sermons to us each and every day at every turn.

The Bible has one path and preaches one way and proclaims that this one way is the only way. So either the Bible is false and one or more ways of the world is true or the Bible is true and every other path that promises life is false. Let us be reminded again of the words of Jesus – I am the way, and the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me. This is why absolute truth is so absolutely important.

In the first 4 woes we learned that false religion will keep you from heaven, false religion offers spirituality without substance, and false religion offers rules without true righteousness. Let’s see what we learn in these final 3 woes about false religion.

- I. False Religion Can Only Provide a Spiritual Façade. It’s Powerless to do the Real Work of Transformation. (vv25-26)
 - a. Now I’m assuming you are like me in that when I go to prepare my dinner, I don’t reach into the sink and grab a dirty plate and cup. I go to the cabinet where the clean plates and cups are stored. That’s the illustration Jesus uses.
 - b. False religion is able to clean up the outside, to provide a façade of spirituality. But it fails to do the real work of transformation.

- c. False religions will send you on journeys and assign chants to be uttered 1,000s of times. They'll keep you busy with activities but once you've gone on your journey and once you've chanted the mantra, you're still the same person on the inside you were when you began.
 - d. False paths will give a momentary sense of freedom and excitement and life but eventually that façade fades right back to where you began with an emptiness and void in your soul.
 - e. Cleanliness on the outside is not necessarily indicative of cleanliness on the inside. A religion or philosophy that starts on the outside is never sufficient for the heart change that is so necessary on the inside. The flesh is powerless to transform the spirit.
 - f. When someone wear a nice outfit, we joke and say, "Well you sure clean up good." That is the problem with false religion. It's merely an external cleaning and the heart is left in the filthiness of sin.
 - g. The gospel works from the inside out. God, in grace, reaches down into our very being and transforms the very core of who we are. God gives us new hearts that beat for His glory and find His purpose and rejoice in His glory. And once the heart is set right, the life begins to follow. It is the power of the gospel alone that cleans the inside of a person and then changes the outside of a person.
 - h. That's why you don't wait until you get your life right to come to Jesus. We come to Jesus as the sinners we are and He transforms us.
 - i. 2 Cor 5:17 – if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. The old has passed away and behold the new has come. False religion is powerless to transform, but the gospel is the power of a new creation – a new you!
- II. False Religion Can Only Provide an Appearance of Life. It's Powerless to Raise the Dead. (vv27-28)
- a. This is almost the same as the previous woe but this one goes a little further. You see our fundamental problem as sinners is not that we sin. Oh sin is ugly and dirty and it hurts us and it hurts others. Sin is a horrible condition. But sin is the fruit of a much deeper problem of the human condition. The Bible reveals that we are spiritually dead on the inside. That's why we sin.

- b. Eph 2:1-2. The reason we live as sinners is because we are spiritually dead.
 - c. Now false religion and false ideas can wash the outside, but the outside is not the root. False religion can give you a smile but it cannot give you joy. False ideas can give you a way to live but they cannot give you life.
 - d. But Jesus says I am the resurrection and the life. The gospel is the only cure for the fundamental problem of the human condition. The gospel is the power of God to raise the dead. Eph 2:4-5.
 - e. When we embrace Christ we come alive, our spirits are brought to life – when we find Christ, we find life, abundant and eternal.
 - f. That is something a false path can never do for you. Oh it may make you happy for now but it will never make you holy forever. It may give some pleasure but it will keep you from paradise.
 - g. The world is like those who buried Lazarus. It can only wrap new cloths around a dead heart, but Jesus through the gospel stands outside the tomb of your heart and cries, “Lazarus, come forth!”
- III. False Religion Fails to See It’s Own Failure and Therefore Only Continues It’s Dead End Path. (vv29-36)
- a. The Pharisees claim to be of the same vein as the righteous men and prophets of the OT, many of whom were persecuted and martyred. Jesus is saying in actuality you are not of the same vein as the righteous who were killed but of those who murdered them.
 - b. This Zechariah mentioned in v35 was killed in 2 Chron. If you recall, in the Hebrew version of the OT, 2 Chron is the last book. Abel is in the Genesis, Zechariah is in 2 Chron. In other words Jesus is saying, from the first book of the OT to the last, you are the same as those who murdered the very ones sent from God.
 - c. And indeed, the Pharisees would see to it that Jesus was crucified, they would continue to martyr the disciples of Jesus and continue their quest to silence the gospel on into the early days of the church beyond the NT.
 - d. The reason why we can’t escape the clutches and chains of false religion and ideologies is because they blind us to our own sin and to the truth. That’s why salvation is by grace and grace alone. Eph 2:8.

- e. We will always believe we are right until God in grace shed the light of truth into our hearts and shows us our sin and need of a Savior.
- IV. Confronting False Religion with Truth is Not Indicative of a Lack of Compassion but Rather a Sign of it. (vv37-39)
- a. When you read ch23, Jesus uses some pretty harsh and blunt words to rebuke the Pharisees. He calls them hypocrites, serpents, vipers, blind guides. If you wonder why is Jesus so harsh? Remember He is addressing the willingly defiant, who not only oppose Him, but oppose all who believe in Him and are leading multitudes away from truth. And they need to hear in the clearest, strongest language that hell is at stake for them if they continue to refuse to repent and believe.
 - b. But the hard truth is not indicative of a lack of compassion. Jesus laments in these verses the hardened refusal of the gospel. He was there, He had come from heaven, He could gather them, but they were not willing.
 - c. The gospel calls us to speak the truth in love to those around us who are caught up in false religions and walking down false paths. But even when we speak the truth in love, praying that our loved ones and friends will repent and believe and be saved, there will be times when we will be labeled haters because we love enough to speak truth.
 - d. But just as Jesus, compassion compels us to share the gospel because the consequence for those we know and those we love is too grave not to – v38.
 - e. In v39 – after they have Jesus crucified, they won't see Him again until His second coming, at which time the time for repentance and faith will have passed.
 - f. Better to hear 7 woes now and repent than to never hear and never repent.

Conclusion – ill. Becket Cook